
Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to the fight against the illicit production, sale, demand, traffic and distribution of Narcotic drugs and Psychotropic substances and related activities, 1998.

INCB/DDR

Recommendations by the International Narcotics Control Board

DRUG DEMAND REDUCTION



INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD

Introduction

1. At its fifty-first session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 51/64 of 12 December 1996 by which it decided to convene a special session on international drug control in June 1998. In that resolution, the General Assembly invited organs, organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system to contribute fully to the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly, in particular by submitting to the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, as the preparatory body for the special session, concrete recommendations on the issues to be addressed by the special session.

2. At its sixty-second session, held from 5 to 16 May 1997 at Vienna, the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) decided to respond to the invitation by the General Assembly by presenting a series of documents containing concrete recommendations that INCB has made on issues to be dealt with at the special session of the General Assembly, identified by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, acting as the preparatory body for the special session.

3. The series of documents of the Board refer to the conclusions and recommendations made by the Board in its annual reports or similar documents, over the last years for consideration of Governments. The documents are meant to facilitate Governments to reach agreement in their deliberations of the various subjects to be discussed at the special session of the General Assembly. Documents have been prepared on:

- < Measures to counter illicit manufacture of, trafficking in and abuse of stimulants (INCB/STI)
- < Measures to enhance the control and monitoring of precursors frequently used in the manufacture of illicit drugs (Document INCB/PRE)
- < Measures to counter money-laundering (Document INCB/MON)
- < Measures to promote judicial cooperation (Document INCB/JUD)
- < Drug demand reduction (Document INCB/DDR)

4. The documents of the Board are available in English, French and Spanish, the working languages of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD ON DRUG DEMAND REDUCTION

5. Drug demand reduction is a matter of concern to the International Narcotics Control Board in the context of its responsibilities under the international drug control treaties. Over the past years, the Board has therefore paid considerable attention to this issue, particularly in its Annual Reports for 1993 (E/INCB/1993/1) and 1997 (E/INCB/1997/1). The present document reproduces the conclusions and recommendations of section A of Chapter I of the Annual Report of the Board for 1993 and those of Chapter I of the Annual Report of the Board for 1997.

The importance of demand reduction

The Board draws the attention of Governments to the importance of drug demand reduction activities in chapter I of its report for 1993 (E/INCB/1993/1). The main observations, conclusions and recommendations are as follows:

“Demand reduction efforts cannot lead to success without substantially reducing the illicit drug supply: if drugs are readily available and easily accessible, new drug abusers will soon replace former ones. At the same time, there is evidence that elimination of a given drug from the market does not mean the elimination of the drug problem but only a shift towards other drugs or substances of abuse. Consequently, without efforts to reduce illicit drug demand, actions aimed at reducing illicit drug supply will lead to only temporary successes.

It is evident that, at the national level, supply reduction and demand reduction cannot be separated from each other. There is, however, a major difference at the international level. Measures against the illicit manufacture, production, traffic and diversion of drugs can be "codified" in international treaties, because their identical application constitutes the *sine qua non* criteria for the functioning of the international drug control system. Demand reduction methods, however, cannot be "standardized" by legal documents.

The Board invites Governments to consider demand reduction as one of their first priorities in the fight against drug abuse. It urges Governments to cooperate closely in exchanging information on the results (failures as well as successes) of their demand reduction programmes. The Board greatly appreciates the efforts of UNDCP and other United Nations entities such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), intergovernmental organizations and some non-governmental organizations. It invites Governments to cooperate with such organizations and to seek their assistance in developing demand reduction programmes.

The provisions of the international drug control treaties are aimed at preventing, or at least reducing, the illicit supply of drugs. Consequently, those provisions constitute the backbone of any national supply reduction programme. In the case of national demand reduction programmes, the situation is different: in most countries, alternative licit substances, above all alcohol, are available on the local markets. Creating a shift from the abuse of drugs under international control to the abuse of alcohol, organic solvents and other substances would constitute a questionable achievement of demand reduction programmes.

Thus, it is of the utmost importance that reduction of the demand for all substances of abuse be the goal of such national programmes. That philosophy is reflected in the WHO approach to the problem: the WHO Programme on Substance Abuse is comprehensive and not limited to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. The Board commends the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence for drawing renewed attention to the problems associated with the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs in its recently published twenty-eighth report. The Board welcomes the emphasis placed by the Expert Committee on the need for a comprehensive approach in combating the abuse of psychoactive drugs. The Board notes that such a comprehensive approach is also present in the UNESCO preventive education strategy.

Development of demand reduction programmes and activities should be based on knowledge of the real drug abuse situation. In the opinion of the Board, it is possible to assess the nature and extent of drug problems without undertaking costly epidemiological studies. The collection of data and other information from law enforcement services, doctors, pharmacists and social workers allows already a rapid assessment of the drug abuse situation (which groups are taking which drugs, by what means etc.) and even a rough assessment of the extensiveness of the problem. The Board wishes to draw the attention of Governments to the need for continuous monitoring of the ever-changing drug abuse situations.

Demand reduction strategies should be carefully designed, taking into consideration not only the individuals concerned, but also the socio-cultural and economic milieu. It follows, therefore, that programmes must be adapted to the society in question.

Community empowerment in relation to drug abuse is often the key link between education and treatment services. Its purpose is to promote the extent to which a community feels that it has some control over the process of making decisions that directly affect them. Especially in circumstances where there may be a virtual absence of social controls, this approach can be crucial to the success of both demand and supply reduction strategies. Strengthening the cohesiveness of communities is therefore one of the most important tasks.

Education programmes must be carefully designed in order to avoid being counter-productive. Support may be given to mass media campaigns to raise public awareness concerning the dangers of drug abuse. The principal target group for education programmes are young people both in and out of school. Programmes for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle that incorporate a drug prevention element should be encouraged. It must be kept in mind that in many developing countries with inadequate health- and social-care services, education programmes are practically the only medium available for demand reduction activities.

The treatment and rehabilitation of drug abusers are key elements of demand reduction strategies. No particular programme, however, has been effective for all drug abusers, even within a single country, and the transfer of a treatment regime from one culture to another has not always been constructive. Consequently, treatment and rehabilitation programmes must be adapted to local conditions and circumstances.

The success of demand reduction programmes depends on two factors: the political will of Governments to tackle the problem, as evidenced by, among other things, the provision of the necessary financial resources; and the community's willingness to cooperate. Without following "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches simultaneously, it is not realistic to expect positive results from demand reduction programmes.

The Board acknowledges the importance of certain aspects of "harm reduction" as a tertiary prevention strategy for demand reduction purposes. The Board considers it its duty, however, to draw the attention of Governments to the fact that "harm reduction" programmes are not substitutes for demand reduction programmes."

Preventing Drug Abuse in an Environment of Illicit Drug Promotion

In chapter I of its report for 1997 (E/INCB/1997/1), the Board analyses and presents the environment in which drug abuse is taking place and presents observations, recommendations and considerations on how to counteract a pro-drug-abuse environment and make prevention more effective.

The Board notes that:

“Preventing the abuse of drugs is becoming an increasingly difficult endeavour, at least partly because of the rapid and growing spread of messages in the environment that promote drug abuse. Many of them can be regarded as public incitement and inducement to use and abuse drugs. Therefore, present efforts at prevention need to be strengthened and innovative prevention initiatives need to be developed and implemented.

Preventive education campaigns aimed at accurately informing the public in general of the effects of drugs and drug abuse will help to promote a more rational approach to drug problems and to avoid sensationalism.

Voluntary codes of conduct could be developed by the media, as suggested in the Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Outline of Future Activities in Drug Abuse Control, to limit the irresponsible statements that are sometimes made and to encourage a more balanced approach to dealing with the issues of drug abuse.

The most promising form of prevention, in the long term, is to try to promote the formation of opinions and attitudes against drug abuse, so that the culture becomes one that is predominantly against drug abuse.

A great deal can be done to counteract the messages in favour of drug abuse to which young people are frequently exposed in the present environment. The individual's environment consists of attitudes concerning the use and abuse of drugs, the availability of illicit drugs and the perception of the risk involved if they are consumed, together with the likelihood of being caught and the penalties imposed. But individuals are in a larger social environment consisting of the family, peers, the community in which they live and the broader society of which they are a part, whose attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour all have an impact on the individual. Successful demand reduction programmes must take into account all these variables simultaneously. Most campaigns against drug abuse do not deal with all risk factors and are not integrated into wider demand reduction programmes. Social influence programmes, for example those concerned with peer pressure and self-esteem, target a narrow range of known risk factors and, on their own, have an impact that is far from substantial. Alternative activities, however, have been found to be effective for specific high-risk groups, for example, thrill-seeking teenagers or young adults. Such groups are likely to use drugs earlier and more often than their peers.

Attitudes are formed at an early age and are influenced at various stages of a child's development by parents, teachers, peers and other potential role models. It is considerably easier to shape the attitudes of young persons, or to move those attitudes in the direction in which they were headed, than to change

already formed attitudes. Thus, drug education, as part of a broader approach concerning healthy lifestyles that has proved effective, should start at an early age. Ideally, it should start with the family, in the pre-school years, and should continue throughout the education of the child and adolescent. Since the results of such early prevention might only be visible after a number of years, politicians obviously preferred to spend only a small part of the available funds on primary prevention. The Board encourages Governments to think in a longer term perspective. Drug education should also be appropriate to the age and culture in question. It should be not only knowledge-oriented but also value- and skill-oriented. The content of the messages should also be closely scrutinized and should target specific population groups. The information given in drug prevention programmes must be accurate. Even exaggeration is counter-productive. Many messages against drug abuse are only given to young people after they have been already exposed to a multitude of messages in favour of drug abuse. This is too late to have much of an effect on established opinions, attitudes and beliefs, let alone reverse them, especially if campaigns against drug abuse are limited, as most are, by monetary constraints. Thus, children should receive messages against drug abuse before they are assailed by messages favouring such abuse.

Children not in a formal education system can be reached by street educators. In addition, young people outside the school environment can be reached through youth clubs and other activities for youth. In some countries these out-of-school activities may be a more important means of reaching young people than the schools. Drug prevention programmes also need to be carefully evaluated, because programmes that may appear to be successful may in fact not be.

The involvement of communities in drug prevention is often important or even essential to the success of prevention activities. In some countries public and private institutions and community organizations have formed a common front to combat drug and crime problems. The private sector is an underutilized but potentially powerful resource in the area of drug abuse prevention.

Much more attention should also be given to those who are experimenting with drugs. It is important that they do not continue such experimentation and become polydrug users or become drug-dependent. The drug culture will have less impact when the number of drug users is reduced. It can be argued that primary prevention and demand reduction programmes have not been effective because they have offered too little too late. Most activities against drug abuse concentrate only on one aspect of demand reduction rather than tackling it across the board. There are many good health promotion, healthy lifestyle, self-esteem-building and decision-making programmes in place in schools, but too often they are not accompanied by programmes aimed at those who are experimenting with drugs or at drug users who need various forms of treatment and rehabilitation programmes.

Just as it is important to influence general attitudes towards drug use and abuse, so it is also important to try to restrict the availability of these drugs. Drug availability itself contributes to the overall atmosphere favouring drug promotion, which is why it is necessary to maintain vigilance concerning the supply of illicit drugs. A reduction in the supply of illicit drugs can be made in several ways: by restricting the importation, manufacture and production of illicit drugs; by limiting the availability of the source material or the precursors, the substances used to manufacture them; by reducing the availability of drugs at the street level; and by complementing such attempts by effective demand reduction programmes.”

In particular, the Board calls on all Governments that it is more necessary than ever to take demand reduction activities seriously, “given the constant messages that are in favour of drug use and

abuse, particularly from pop culture and some media” :

“The media have always been an influential force in public education. In general, the media take their role in the prevention of drug abuse and the related problems seriously and have been a factor in drawing the attention of Governments to the magnitude of the problem and in alerting the public to the menace of drug abuse and illicit trafficking. Governments should help the media in their endeavours and should work together with them as partners, in order to prevent drug abuse.

The Board calls on Governments to use new forms of communication, particularly the Internet, in order to disseminate objective information about drug abuse. Governments are also invited to seek the cooperation of the telecommunications industries and software providers in removing illegal subject matter from the Internet. Given the important function of popular figures in the sports and music industries as role models for young people and adolescents, Governments should endeavour to engage those individuals as advocates of the struggle against drug abuse and illicit trafficking.

The Board wishes to remind parties to the 1988 Convention that article 3 of that Convention requires them to establish as a criminal offence public incitement or inducement to use drugs illicitly. The Board urges Governments to ensure that their national legislation contains such provisions and that those provisions are enforced, making violators liable to sanctions that have an appropriate deterrent effect.

The Board also wishes to remind parties to the international drug control treaties that they are required to provide a range of demand reduction measures. Article 38 of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 as amended by the 1972 Protocol states that parties should give special attention to and take all practicable measures for the prevention of abuse of drugs and for the early identification, treatment, education, aftercare, rehabilitation and social reintegration of the persons involved and should coordinate their efforts to those ends. Article 20 of the Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971 and article 14 of the 1988 Convention have similar provisions. The importance of reducing illicit demand for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances was recognized in the Political Declaration and Global Programme of Action adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution S-17/2 of 27 February 1990 and in several resolutions adopted by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs since then. It was also emphasized in the report of the Board for 1993. It is hoped that at the special session of the General Assembly on international drug control, to be held from 8 to 10 June 1998, a declaration on demand reduction will be adopted and greater priority and renewed urgency will be given to the development of demand reduction programmes.

While the Board recognizes that the effectiveness of demand reduction programmes may vary according to the cultural context and environment in which they are implemented, there are nevertheless a number of elements that are the key to reducing the illicit demand for drugs. For prevention programmes to be effective, they must start early, be comprehensive and tailor their messages to the market. They must also be sustained and must maintain their credibility by not exaggerating or understating the consequences of drug abuse. It is the belief of the Board that, if these principles are followed and if sufficient resources are allocated to this end, preventive measures can have a real impact on the problem of drug abuse.

The importance of prevention is pivotal, not only because young people are being inundated with messages favouring drug abuse, but also because of the changing social, economic and political

environments, which have led to social upheaval and a lessening of social controls. The opening up of new trafficking routes and the rapid increase in drug abuse in countries previously without a demand problem have led to an upsurge in the number of drug abusers. To counteract this, not only must the supply side of the equation continue to be pursued with vigour, but also the demand side must be tackled with urgency and in a more thorough and comprehensive way. The Board wishes to draw Governments' attention to their responsibility to counteract and limit the promotion of messages favouring the use of licit as well as illicit drugs, because the promotion of licit drug consumption also has ramifications concerning people's attitudes towards illicit drug consumption."